

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
For the Montana National Register of Historic Places Program and State Antiquities Database

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Montana Historical Society
PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **2360 Airport Road**

Historic Address (if applicable): **NA**

City/Town: **Helena, MT**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis & Clark County**

Historic Name: **Montana Aeronautics Commission
Operations Building**

Original Owner(s): **Montana Aeronautics Commission**

Current Ownership ☐ Private ☒ Public

Current Property Name: **Montana Aeronautics
Commission Operations Building**

Owner(s): **Montana Department of Transportation –
Aeronautics Division**

Owner Address: **PO Box 200507
Helena, MT 59620-0507**

Phone: **(406) 444-9569**

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **10N** Range: **3W**

SW ¼ SE ¼ SW ¼ of Section: **21**

Lot(s): **NA**

Block(s): **NA**

Addition: **NA** Year of Addition: **NA**

USGS Quad Name: **Helena** Year: **1985**

Historic Use: **Office and hangar**

Current Use: **Office and hangar**

Construction Date: **1958** ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual

☒ Original Location ☐ Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov/topofinder2

☐ NAD 27 ☒ NAD 83 (preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **423943** Northing: **5161461**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Date of this document: **November 16, 2009**

Form Prepared by: **Diana J. Painter, PhD**

Address: **3518 N. C Street, Spokane, WA 99205**

Daytime Phone: **(707) 364-0697**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: ☒ yes ☐ no

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Date: 11/16/2010

Evaluator: Kate Hampton

Comments:

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 2

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

X See Additional Information Page

Architectural Style: **Modern** If Other, specify:

Property Type: **Office** Specific Property Type: **Office, airplane hangar & shop**

Architect: Architectural Firm/City/State: **Ostheimer & Campeau, Helena, MT**

Builder/Contractor: **Mel Buck Construction** Company/City/State: **E. W. Bunnell, consulting engineers,**

Source of Information: **City of Helena building permit files**

The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operation Building is a one-story, irregularly-shaped building with a flat roof with deep eaves over the banks of windows. It is located at 2360 Airport Road, on the north side of the road within a corridor of industrial and office buildings. The building entries are located on the west side of the building, while the rear of the building faces north across the runway to the Helena Regional Airport grounds. A shop associated with the building is located south of the building, across a small yard. The building is brick masonry construction, with a built-up roof and concrete foundation. It is a Modern building constructed in 1958.

Massing and design. The building is visually divided into three components, a lower L-shaped wing to the front, which houses the offices; a taller L-shaped element to the rear of the offices that houses a taller hangar; and behind this, a lower linear wing that houses the smaller hangars. The shop south of the main building, which has a shallow-sloped, side gable roof, completes the complex.

The main entrance to the building is on the west façade, which was originally the end of the linear building, but it now represents the end of the L-shaped office wing. It displays the most 'stylish' feature of the building, which is a slightly V-shaped, open, concrete screen wall that supports the pentagon-shaped flat-roof overhang over the entry. Three round metal posts extend from the top of the screen wall to support the wood roof of the overhang, giving it an open, floating appearance. The overhang is fixed to the brick endwall of the building, slightly below the metal coping that finishes the wall. The entry, which is centered under the overhang, consists of a wood door with full-height glass with a wide sidelight to the left. To the right of the door is mounted a brass emblem with the Montana Aeronautics Commission logo.

The L-shape of the office and conference room wing faces the entrance to the site. The office wing, to the left, has a bank of eight one-over-one-light windows with wood frames, set within the brick masonry wall with brick sills. The upper lights, which comprise about three-quarters of the height of the windows, are fixed. The lower portions are operable windows or solid panels in a 1-2-1-2-1-1 pattern. Sheltering these windows is a deep overhang with exposed rafters and a wood fascia finishing the edge of the roofline.

The north or 'field' side of this westerly wing has a slight projection on the west end, faced with three windows of the same design as the windows on the south side of the wing. This houses an executive office. The rest of the north façade of this wing is comprised of a bank of windows that more or less repeats the bank on the south side.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 3

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The north-south wing that is located perpendicular to the east-west wing is newer than the original, and displays slightly different materials and detailing. A secondary entry is located at the apex to the "L" of the two wings. This consists of a central door with sidelights and a three-light transom above in anodized aluminum. This wing has a bank of three windows similar to the windows in the west wing, but with slightly different frame details. It houses a conference room, and is anchored by a brick-clad endwall with a short parapet that is slightly higher than the deep eaves over the windows. This wall is brick-clad and displays no openings.

The rear or east-facing side of this wing, like the original wing, displays a bank of windows with a deep overhang that faces the interior work yard. There are three windows on this façade, matching the windows on the west-facing façade.

The east wing of the Aeronautics building houses three hangars. This was part of the original concept of the building, and is still the case. The hangar bay on the west end is high, with an overhead door and vertically-oriented, multi-light, steel-frame window. The bay in the middle is lower in height, as is the rest of this wing. The central portion on the south façade has sliding doors that fold into one another. To the right of this major bank of doors are another steel-frame window and a smaller overhead door.

The endwall of this wing, which faces east, has one vertically-oriented, multi-light, steel-frame window set within the brick endwall (this same window appears also on the north and south facades of this wing; see below). The north façade, which faces the airport runway, consists of two corrugated metal doors separated by a steel frame window similar to the other windows on the building. The doors are lower on the east end and higher on the higher bay toward the west end of this wing. They slide up to open and are reportedly very heavy. A horizontal wood 'arm' projects from the building on this wing on the east and west ends. Its purpose is unknown.

Materials and details. The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operation Building is brick masonry construction. The bricks are oversized, a deep red color, and have a combed or striated finish. They are set in a running bond pattern. Other materials on the building include the wood frames of the office windows and wood trim on the fascia. The screen wall is made of up solid concrete masonry units set such that the open portions between the units are square, while the units themselves are rectangular.

The hangar portion of the building appropriately displays different materials. The design of the hangar doors is various; some are new and a few appear to be original to the building. The multi-light are large windows, with a slightly vertical orientation. The individual lights are small and narrow. There are four rows of lights; the two middle rows appear to be part of an operable sash. The profile of the steel is "T" shaped, and the horizontal rails wrap in front of the vertical mullions. All four windows on the east half of the building display this same design. The wood windows of the office portion and the steel windows of the hangar all have brick sills of standard proportions, in contrast to the brick of the building.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 4

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

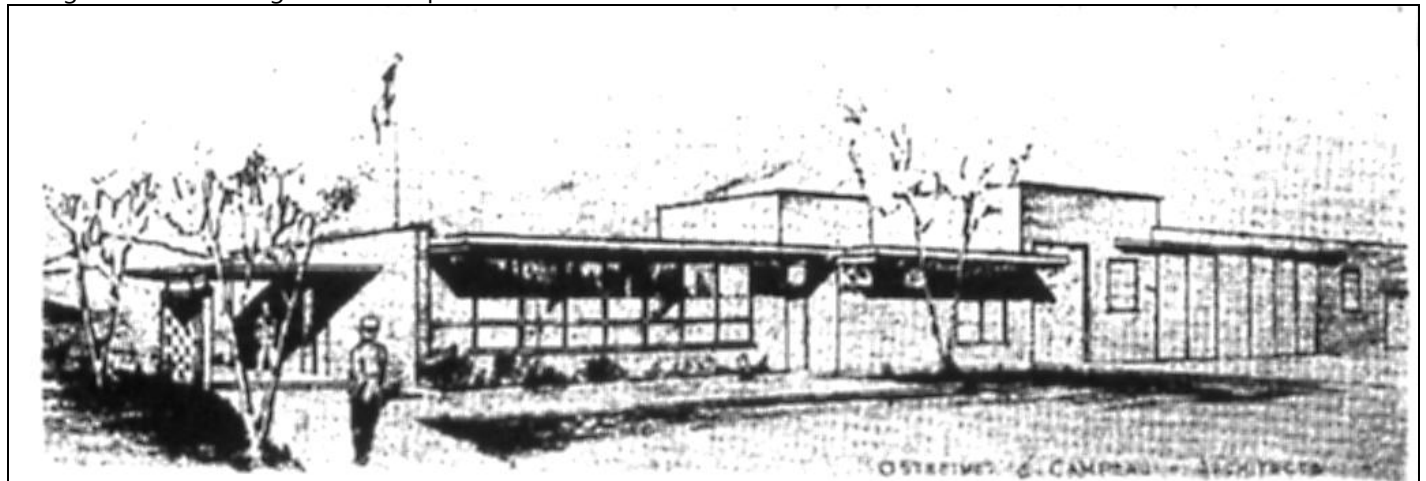
Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Landscaping and site features. The two buildings in this complex (see below, "Accessory structure") are set within an asphalt yard with some concrete pads, and enclosed with a cyclone security fence. They are located within a corridor of mostly industrial buildings on the north side of Airport Road. There are no landscaping or site features to speak of. The Helena Regional Airport runway is located to the north of the site. The shop is located south of the hangars within the second cyclone fence.

Accessory structure. The shop, which is located south of the main building, was originally conceived as part of the complex. It has a rectangular footprint and a moderately-sloped side gable roof, with moderate eaves and a ridgeline running east to west. Facing the yard, on the north side, are four overhead garage doors. The two doors on the east end are double door and the two doors on the west end are single garage doors. All four are paneled doors with two rows of lights in the upper portion. The body of the building, like the main building, is brick masonry. The roof is composition shingle and it has a slab foundation. A small pedestrian door with a single light in the upper portion is located on the west side of the north façade. There are no other distinguishing features on this building.

Changes over time. The secondary wing (north-south wing) of the building is newer than the original building. It has slightly different details, and an anodized aluminum door. The exterior features of the original building are still extant inside this newer wing, which houses a conference room. The date of the addition is unknown. Additional changes include a 36' x 34' addition to the shop in 2002. The hangar doors were replaced in 2003. It appears that no additional changes to the building have taken place.



FRONT VIEW—This is an architect's drawing of the new \$75,000 Montana aeronautics commission operations and headquarters building now being constructed at the Helena Municipal airport. General contractor Mel Buck, Cascade, who is also building the new mansion for Montana governors, began work a few weeks ago. The building is expected to be completed this summer. It will house the entire staff of the Montana aeronautics administration, including the office of Director Frank W. Wiley and Airport Administrator T. Mark Radcliffe. It also will have hanger space for three airplanes, shown on right. The structure will be located just east of the airport administration building, facing north toward the main leading runway and the Sleeping Giant. Ostheimer and Campeau, Helena, are architects.

Sketch of proposed Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building

The Independent Record, February 23, 1958

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 5

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

☒ See Additional Information Page

The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building was constructed in 1958 to house the aeronautics administration staff, including the Director and Administrator, and provide hangar space for three planes. It was located east of the Airport Administration Building when constructed, and faced out onto the runway. The shop, located south of the main building, was part of the original conception. Additions have been made to the Aeronautics building and to the shop, but it essentially serves the same purpose today as it did in 1958, and is occupied by the same government agency and use.

The building was designed by the Helena firm of Ostheimer and Campeau, with E. W. Bunnell as consulting engineers and Mel Buck as the general contractor. The building was estimated to cost \$75,000 when proposed in February 1958. The building officially opened with a flag rising on November 7, 1958 ("*New Aeronautics Commission Building Ready*," 1958:12).

Historic context. Helena has a rich aviation history that appears to be centered mainly on the early history of the Helena Municipal (now Regional) Airport. The St. Charles Aero Club was formed in 1911 as a result of talks given at Helena High School, St. Vincent's Academy, and Mt. St. Charles College (forerunner of Carroll College) (*Paladin*, 1996:140). The first flight over the Continental Divide was undertaken by Cromwell Dixon, a young flying enthusiast from Columbus, Ohio, that same year. Beginning in Helena, it attracted nation-wide attention to Montana.

INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

☐ See Additional Information Page

City of Helena buildings permit records. On file, Helena Building Department, October 2009.

"Cromwell Dixon Struck Mighty blow For Aviation When He Flew Across Continental Divide in 1911," *The Independent Record*, April 6, 1952:1.

Harris, Cyril M., *American Architecture, An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

"Helena as She Was, Images of Montana's Capital City," http://www.lifelikecharm.com/buildings_of_note.htm, downloaded November 11, 2009.

Illustration, Montana aeronautics commission operations and headquarters building, *The Independent Record*, February 23, 1958:1.

Jester, Thomas C., Editor, *Twentieth-Century Building Materials, History and Conservation*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995.

"New Aeronautics Commission Building Ready," *The Independent Record*, November 2, 1958:12.

Paladin, Vivian and Jean Baucus, *Helena, An Illustrated History*. Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996(1983).

R. L. Polk & Co., *Helena City Directory*. Salt Lake City: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1947, 1950, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967 – 1991.

Rubano, Anthony, "The Grille is gone: The Rise and Fall of Screen Block," *Preserving the Recent Past 2*. Washington D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2000.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1930; 1930 updated to 1951; 1930 updated to 1958.

Wiley, Frank W., *Montana and the Sky*. Montana Aeronautics Commission, 1966.

"Work of Montana Aeronautics Building to Start," *Montana Standard*, February 12, 1958:3.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 6

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

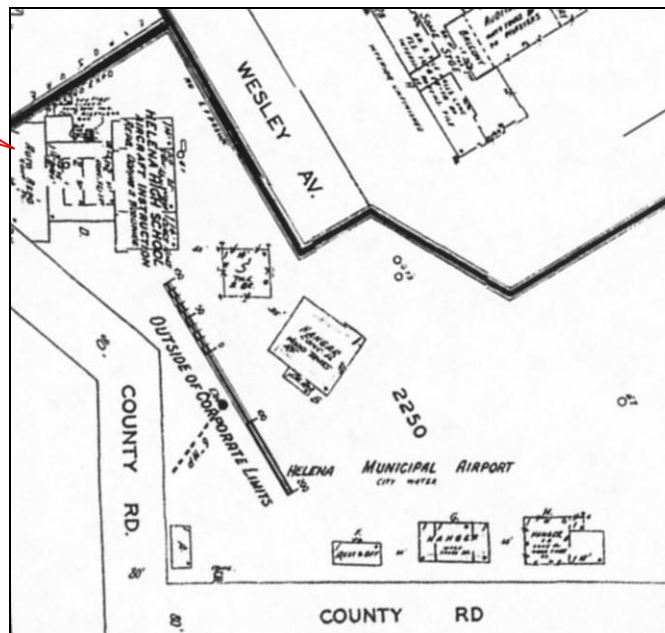
HISTORIC CONTEXT

The first air show in Montana was held in 1920 in Helena. Charles A. Lindburgh stopped in Helena on his famous cross-country trip in 1927, the same year that Montana's first mail plane in Montana made its initial landing in Helena. Another famous aviator who visited Helena was Amelia Earhart Putnam, who visited in 1933 with Colonel Brittin of Northwest Airways (*Paladin*, 1996:165). A well-known woman aviator from Montana was Katherine Stinson, the fourth licensed woman aviator in the country. She did exhibition flights in Helena for several years, beginning in 1913, and went on to a national and international flying career. The airfield shared space with the municipal golf course at this time, about 3.5 miles west of its present location (*Wiley*, 1965:301).

In 1931 when R. E. Morrison and L. W. Fahrner took over Helena's Airport, it consisted of a 40' x 90' hangar ("*Cromwell Dixon Struck Mighty blow For Aviation When He Flew Across Continental Divide in 1911*," 1952:1). The Helena Municipal Airport Administration Building (no longer extant; destroyed in 2006), was constructed under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration in 1936 and the airport dedicated on May 2, 1938. At the time Northwest Airlines was the main commercial carrier serving the airport ("*Helena as She Was, Images of Montana's Capital City*," http://www.lifelikecharm.com/buildings_of_note.htm).

Aviation played an important educational and recreational role in the Helena and Montana history, in addition to its work-related role with the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Postal Service. Evident in the 1950 and 1958 Sanborn map of Helena is the Helena High School Aircraft Instruction Building, which housed the Helena School of Aeronautics. This school was the first fully accredited aeronautics high school of its kind in the country (*Paladin*, 1996:166).

Helena High
School
Aircraft
Instruction



The Helena Municipal Airport & related buildings in 1958, prior to Construction of the Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 7

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

The Montana Pilots Association was founded in 1939, at which time Montana had 77 landing strips, including unimproved fields. In 1945 the Montana Aeronautics Commission was created by the Montana legislature to create and enforce standards for training, safety, and related concerns. Members of the Montana Pilots Association were instrumental in creating the Commission.

The Montana Pilots Association held its annual convention in Helena in 1952. Like many airports, the Helena Municipal Airport was improved during World War II and used for pilot training. By 1952 the Administration Building housed the Civil Aeronautics Administration and US weather bureau offices, and was served by Northwest Airlines and Western America airlines. The airport was also home to two flying schools ("*Cromwell Dixon Struck Mighty blow For Aviation When He Flew Across Continental Divide in 1911*," 1952:1).



The Montana Municipal Airport Administration Building (no longer extant)

Source: "Helena as She Was, Images of Montana's Capital City"

The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building was constructed over twenty years after the dedication of the Helena Municipal Airport, an achievement in the history of aviation in Helena that was the culmination of over twenty years of activism on the part of the aviation community. The Montana Aeronautics Commission was formed also as the result of the activities of the Montana Pilots Association to improve standards and safety. The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building does not appear to have played as central a role in the development of aviation in Montana as this earlier administration building or early events and activities. The Montana Aeronautics Commission has been central, however, in carrying on these activities and in preserving Montana aviation history. Their archives are located at the Montana Historical Society.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 8

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NRHP Listing Date:

NRHP Eligibility: ☒ Yes ☐ No ☒ Individually ☐ Contributing to Historic District ☐ Noncontributing to Historic District

NRHP Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Area of Significance: Period of Significance:

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

☒ See Additional Information Page

The Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building is a modest, Modern building whose main stylistic flourish is the design of the entry, which sports a simple concrete screen and pentagon-shaped overhang. It is most interesting as a building type, in that the offices and hangars for the organization are housed in the same building, and have been for over 50 years. Consistent with modern architectural ideology, the appearance of the offices and the hangars is distinctly different, reflecting their interior functions, and the sculptural form of the building reflects the fact that one hangar is larger than the other two.

The building as first conceived had a strongly linear character, which may have implied at the time that the building was designed to be expanded in a linear pattern as necessary. This is a concept that informed some post-war structures, particularly those with a linear, "extruded," configuration. Nonetheless, when the building was enlarged to accommodate a conference room, this wing was added in a way that the offices now form an "L," which in turn create separation between the hangar/shop complex and the office functions and form a separate work yard. The office/hangar and shop complex comprises a self-sufficient whole that has apparently served the Commission well for 51 years.

INTEGRITY

☐ See Additional Information Page

Although it is not necessary to evaluate the integrity of a building if it does not meet any of the Evaluation Criteria that would qualify it for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, it is worth noting here that the building and complex has good integrity. If, in the future, the building is found significant as a singular building type, it will be important to analyze its integrity.

- The building displays integrity of location. It is in its original location.
- The building has good design integrity. A perpendicular wing has been added, but it was designed with the same architectural vocabulary and materials as the rest of the building, and would likely meet the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation if constructed today.
- The building retains fair integrity of setting and the immediate complex is intact. When constructed the setting was less developed, but this is an industrial corridor whose function is to evolve to meet current needs.
- The building retains integrity of materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It is particularly notable for having been built for the Montana Aeronautics Commission, which still uses the building today in the way it was intended. The building retains integrity.

The shop, which has been expanded, also retains integrity, as the expansion continued the same functions and appearance as the original building. The offices, hangars, and shops function as a whole, and are part of the same complex.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 9

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Further research, particularly research comparing similar building types, may reveal that this building is significant as a distinctive and unusual building type that combines offices and hangars, and that the complex, which includes shops, is unique as self-sufficient unit in support of this type of organization (Criterion C). At this time the modest design of the building does not appear warrant listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, as it does not appear to embody the distinctive characteristics of a period, or method of construction, or represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values; its basic form has also been altered (albeit in a compatible way).

It does not appear to be associated with any one member of the Montana Pilots Association whose activities are particularly noteworthy (Criterion B); rather, the entire organization over time has been active in supporting aviation in Montana and pushed for the creation of the Montana Aeronautics Commission. The building is however significant for its association with the Montana Aeronautics Commission and that organization's role in Montana's important aviation and aeronautics safety and training history. It is therefore significant under Criterion A, and has sufficient integrity to carry this association.



Plaque in the Montana Aeronautics Commission Operations Building

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**



Description: **South and west facades of office wings, November 3, 2009; viewed from southwest**



Description: **South and east facades of hangar wings, November 3, 2009; viewed from southeast**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**



Description: **North façade of office wing, November 3, 2009; viewed from northwest**



Description: **East and north facades of hangar wing, November 3, 2009; viewed from northeast**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**



Description: **North and west facades of shop, November 3, 2009; viewed from northwest**



Description: **Detail of entry on west side of building, November 6, 2009; viewed from southwest**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**



Description: **Detail, emblem at front entry, November 3, 2009**

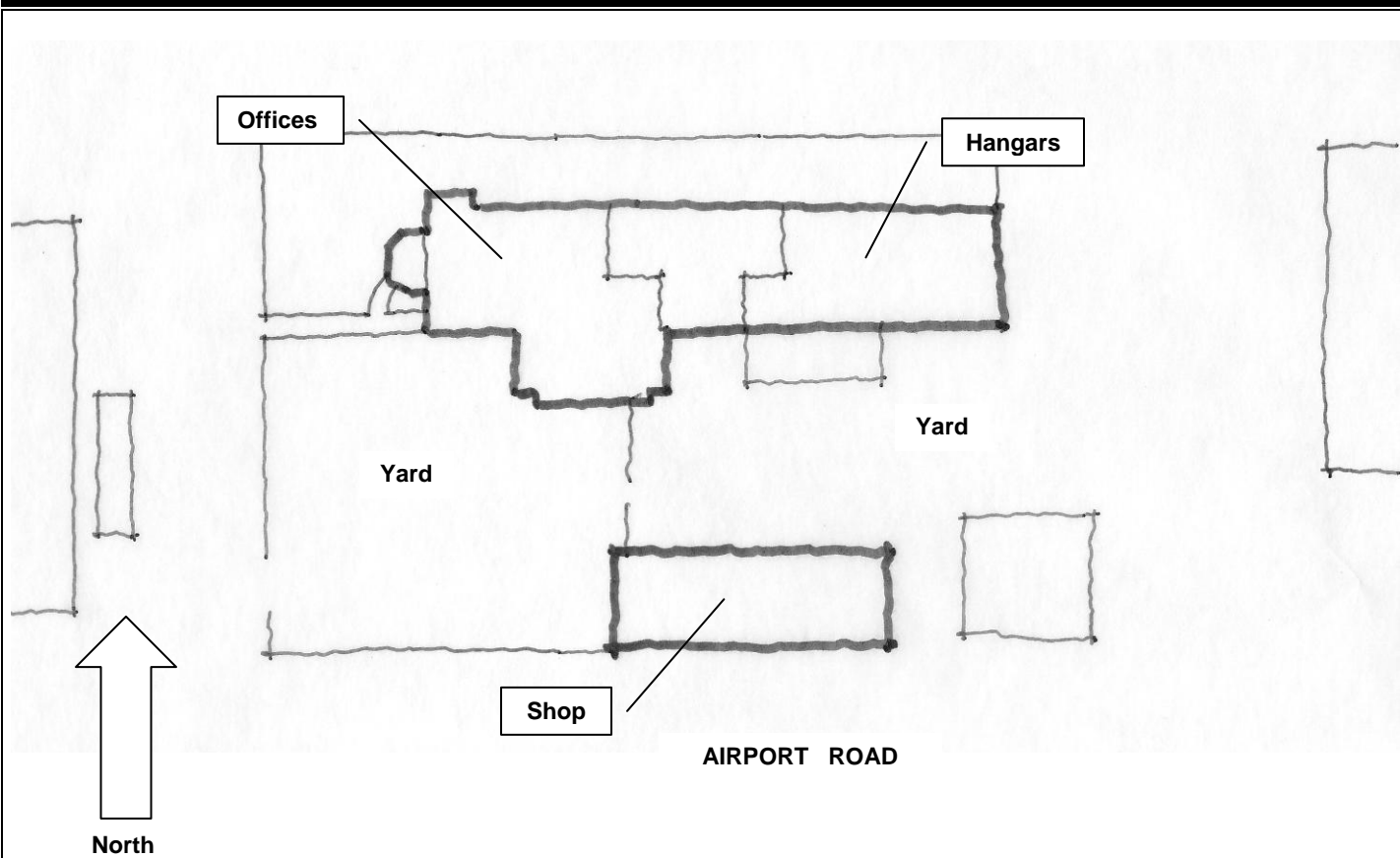


Description: **Detail, window on hangar wing, November 3, 2009**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
SITE MAP

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**



2630 Airport Road sketch map

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Property Name: **2360 Airport Road**

Site Number: **24 LC 2192**

